

A Special Visit:

Alexander de Seversky in Argentina

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Introduction

In 1949, Major Alexander de Seversky, at the time one of the most recognized figures in the aeronautical field worldwide, visited Argentina in response to very specific needs of the government of President Juan Domingo Perón. This visit was not only critical in terms of foreign and economic policy, but it also presented a transformational opportunity for the Argentinian Air Force in the emerging international strategic aviation environment.

Early Cold War Years

When the Cold War began shortly after the end of World War II (WWII), the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) emerged as dominant global powers, while the United Kingdom (UK) receded as a world actor.¹ The first phase of the Cold War (1945–1953) was characterized by deep tension between the US and the USSR and the risk of an imminent global nuclear conflict.

After the partition of Germany and Berlin in 1945, Europe was divided into two major spheres of influence: US influenced Western Europe and USSR influenced Eastern Europe. The rivalry was confirmed when, in 1946, Winston Churchill declared that an iron curtain had descended on Europe.²

In 1946, a Chinese civil war ignited between the Nationalists (who received US aid) and the Communists, along with the start of the Indochinese War, in which France, supported by the US, pitted Vietnamese Nationalists and Communists against each other. In early 1947, the UK requested help from the US to defend Greece and Turkey, two countries threatened by communist guerrillas as well as diplomatic pressure from the USSR and Eastern European countries. On 12 March 1947, President Truman declared US support to the free states resisting subjugation by armed minorities or external pressures (known as the Truman Doctrine), and successfully assisted Greece and Turkey to overcome their com-

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munist rebellions.³ It was during this time that George Kennan's Containment Strategy emerged from the Truman Doctrine.

In 1947, the US initiated the Marshall Plan in Europe and, to defend the American continent, supported the Rio de Janeiro Conference, where the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (known as TIAR—*Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca*) was approved. For his part, Joseph Stalin, the leader of the USSR, created the Communist Information Bureau, *Cominform*, to shape the communist movement in Europe.⁴ To strengthen security in the Western Hemisphere, the Organization of American States was created in 1948. This time also saw the beginning of the process of decolonization in Asia and Africa.⁵ In early 1948, a pro-Soviet coup d'état installed a communist government in Czechoslovakia. Soon after, in the face of the land blockade of West Berlin by the USSR, the US implemented a successful airlift over Berlin (1948–1949). To counter the economic and social benefits of the Marshall Plan, the USSR created the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1949, and on 4 April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed to counteract the Soviet threat. That same year, the pro-capitalist Federal Republic of Germany and the pro-Soviet German Democratic Republic were created as well. In Asia, the Chinese civil war culminated in a communist victory with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949, while the Nationalists formed the Republic of Taiwan, supported by the US. With the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb in 1949, the decade ended with the US losing its worldwide nuclear monopoly.

The 1950s started with the strengthening of the communist bloc through a treaty of alliance and mutual aid between the USSR and the PRC. This was followed by the start of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, when North Korea, i.e., the “Democratic” People's Republic of Korea, supported by the Sino-Soviet communist bloc, invaded South Korea, i.e., Republic of Korea, which was supported by the US.

With the passing of Stalin on 5 March 1953, a new period of the Cold War began: Peaceful Coexistence. This was followed with the signing of the Armistice of Panmunjom which ended the Korean War on 27 July 1953, keeping North and South Korea divided along the 38th parallel.

The Argentine Republic in Perón's First Presidential Term (1946–1952)

In 1945, Argentina established an electoral process that brought an end to the military regime that had ruled the country since 4 June 1943. It was at this time that General Juan Domingo Perón rose to the presidency as the lead candidate from the

old military regime. Perón, described as an authoritarian and with Nazi-fascist tendencies, was supported by a varied alliance, while the opposition, the Democratic Union, presented itself as the standard-bearer of democracy and freedom.

The Democratic Union was supported by Spruille Braden, the US ambassador to Argentina. Quick on his feet, Perón warned that the country was at a historical crossroads and launched a timely slogan with a strong political-electoral tone: “Braden or Perón!”⁶ This exacerbated the historical difficulties in the relationship between Argentina and the US, which had been especially deteriorated by the neutral stance Argentina initially took at the outbreak of WWII. US distrust of Argentina continued, even though the Argentine military regime eventually broke diplomatic relations with the Axis in 1944, declared war against them in 1945, adhered to the Act of Chapultepec to promote Inter-American solidarity, and then joined the United Nations.

Perón won the election and assumed the presidency on 4 June 1946. His government had a strong nationalist and popular framework, structured on three principles: social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty. To further strengthen his position, he founded the Perónist Party in 1947.⁷

During Perón’s first government, Argentina had a brief period of economic prosperity (1946–1949), in great part due to WWII and the post-war period: a favorable trade balance, a rise in the prices of its agricultural products, the accumulation of reserves in the Central Bank, and the expansion of its organic industrial capability to replace dependence on imports (at the time, the UK was its main trading partner).

Perón established the concept of the Welfare State, consisting of strong and active state intervention in economic and social policy to improve the economic and social conditions, and the quality of life, of workers and the public. To promote his efforts to improve Argentina’s economy, his first five-year plan promoted agricultural exports and domestic light industry, while his wife, Eva Perón, created the Social Aid Foundation to promote his social policy.

Between 1945 and 1948, Perón’s government nationalized the Central Bank and numerous service providers (gas, electricity, telephones, ports, and railways). To control foreign trade, he created the Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Exchange (known as IAPI—*El Instituto Argentino de Promoción del Intercambio*), which consolidated the statist nature of the economy. Perónist foreign policy manifested itself as a third position ideology which rejected traditional capitalist and communist models and was popularly immortalized with the famous slogan: “Neither Yankees nor Marxists: Perónists.”⁸

Throughout Perón’s first term, the US continued its historic distrust of Argentina. From the beginning of his presidency, Perón, despite his previous

anti-American slogans, promoted rapprochement and friendly gestures toward the US, but his initiatives did not convince the US, who saw the regime as unpredictable and unreliable. Argentina did little to collaborate with the TIAR and tried to participate in the Marshall Plan, within the rigid and statist business model of the IAPI, which further distanced it and increased its distrust of the US.⁹

The Perón government's conviction of an imminent direct war between the two Cold War powers, which could benefit Argentina as a supplier of raw materials and food, prevented straightforward relations with the US.

Around 1948, Argentina's period of economic and social prosperity showed warning signs and very soon a period of depression and economic crisis began, because of changes the international environment and unfavorable policies the US implemented towards the Argentine government.

On the domestic front, there was an increase in inflation, an increase in the printing of money, public spending, economic stagnation, the maintenance of economic statism, a fall in wages and savings capacity, a decrease in industrial production and investment due to a lack of spare parts (which had to be imported and paid for in dollars), a great drought that affected agricultural production, and a lack of dollars in the Central Bank's reserves.

As the UK declined as a world power and global economic and trade power passed to the US, the predominance of the Marshall Plan in the European economy, good harvests in the US and Europe, and the US economic and commercial boycott of Argentina had serious consequences for the country: a fall in exports, a deterioration in foreign trade, the closure of European markets, and a reversal in the international prices of its agricultural products. Additionally, due to the inconvertibility of its currency, the US dollars so necessary for the Argentine economy could not be obtained.

As a pragmatist and realist, Perón was aware of the critical situation and the mistakes made and did not hesitate to reverse the course of economic and foreign policy. In January 1949, he initiated economic policies reorienting priorities to increase and introduce technology to improve agricultural production and industry, and a policy of greater rapprochement and friendship with the US.¹⁰ It was precisely in this political, diplomatic, and economic context that Major Alexander de Seversky visited Argentina. Before proceeding with the events de Seversky's visit, it is necessary to summarize the situation of the Argentine Air Force at that time.

State of the Argentine Air Force

On 4 January 1945, the Secretariat of Aeronautics was created; thus, military aeronautics left the purview of the Argentine Army and became a new independent Armed Force: The Argentine Air Force. This process took place

when the military regime was in control (1943–1946) and was especially supported by then-Colonel Perón, the dominant figure of the regime.

Perón had told a group of military aviators that before WWII, “in Europe, people moved from one place to another by air. In Rio de Janeiro, when I was returning to Argentina, I saw that at the Santos Dumont Airport, a plane landed every five minutes, whereas here, every time a plane passes by, we all look up.”¹¹

The Secretariat of Aeronautics was the highest aeronautical authority in the country, with responsibility for military, commercial and civil aviation (minus naval aviation).¹² Between 1945 and 1949 the Air Force underwent extraordinary development in doctrine, legislation, organization, personnel, air materiel, industry, infrastructure, commercial air transport, and civil aviation, etc.¹³ The Secretariat was composed of: Air Force Command; General Headquarters; General Directorate of Civil Aeronautics; Directorate of Military Aeronautical Institutes; Active Air Defense Command; General Command of Air-Territorial Zones; and the Aerotechnical Institute and Air Traffic Directorate, amongst Other organizations included bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-interceptor, and air transport regiments.¹⁴ Between 1945 and 1949, several aircraft acquired in the UK, Argentina’s main trading partner, were added to the Air Force’s inventory, including Gloster Meteor jet fighters, Avro Lincoln and Avro Lancaster heavy bombers, and Vickers Viking and Bristol 170 Freighter transports.¹⁵

The national aeronautical industry was driven by the Aerotechnical Institute, which built various military and civilian aircraft: IAe 27 Pulqui I jet fighter (the first manufactured in South America), IAe DL-22 (advanced trainer), IAe 24 Calquín (attack and light bomber) and IAe 30 Ñamcú (fighter-interceptor). To strengthen the sector and train professionals, the School of Aeronautical Engineering was created in 1947.

In commercial aviation, various state airlines were consolidated, and joint aerocommercial companies were promoted using state and private funds. Airport infrastructure was also developed: inauguration of the Buenos Aires City Airport occurred in 1947, along with the modernization of existing airfields (such as Morón, for example).

Through the Reform of the National Constitution on 11 March 1949, the Ministry of Aeronautics was created to replace the Secretariat of Aeronautics. On 15 March 1949, the framework of the Air Force was reformed; thus, six new operational units (brigades) were created, and higher headquarters were reorganized, to include Top Command as well as Defense, Bombing, Exploration and Liaison, Air Transport and Military Aeronautical Institutes commands. Finally, on 17 March 1949, Brigadier César Raúl Ojeda, previously Undersecretary of Aeronautics and

acting Secretary of Aeronautics, took office as Minister of Aeronautics, who continued and enhanced the work begun in 1945.

Alexander de Seversky

As a scholar of air warfare, Alexander de Seversky (1894–1974) became a world leader on air power theory. He was a veteran of the First World War, serving as a military and naval air pilot. He was also an aeronautical engineer, aircraft designer, builder, tester, and inventor. During the Second World War, he was a prominent leader and supervisor of atomic weapons tests.

He was born on 7 June 1894, in Tbilisi, then part of the Russian Empire. When he was barely ten years old, he joined the Tsarist Army. Soon after, he graduated as a lieutenant from the Naval Academy in 1914. During World War I (1914–1918), he was part of a destroyer force in the Baltic Sea. He went on to graduate as both a military aviator and a naval aviator. While integrated into naval aviation, he was very active in numerous bombing and fighter operations against Germany in the Baltic. During a bombing mission he was seriously wounded and lost his right leg. Once recovered, he directed the construction of hydroplanes.

Despite his physical disadvantage, and at his special request, he returned to service with an artificial leg. In 1917, he was head of Baltic fighter aviation. His aerial victories against the Germans made him an ace aviator, receiving various decorations and recognitions. Rear Admiral Doudorov praised de Seversky as “one of the most capable pilots and officers for his personal bravery, military spirit and inventiveness.”¹⁶

Because of his dedication to technical-aeronautical affairs, he traveled to the US in 1918 on a Russian naval aviation mission. Upon Russia’s withdrawal from WWI and the success of the Bolshevik revolt, he remained in the US (1918), where he offered his services, took up residence, and married Evelyn Olliphant. From then until his death, he became a valuable and active collaborator, consultant, and reference in the aeronautical field. As an advisor, admirer, and disciple of General William Mitchell, he worked with him on aerial bombardment practices on a battleship (1921).¹⁷ For his technical knowledge, he was appointed an aeronautical engineer and test pilot for the Department of Defense.

He received US citizenship in 1927 and was inducted as a reserve major into the Army Air Force Specialist Corps in 1928. In 1931 he founded the Seversky Aircraft Corporation, where numerous excellent fighter aircraft were planned, designed, manufactured, and tested by himself.

Major de Seversky advised on the development of numerous combat aircraft; he planned, designed, and built various types of aircraft and invented numerous aeronautical devices and instruments: an automatic bombing sight, a high-speed

amphibious aircraft, the first low-wing aircraft for training in the Army Air Force, and an air-cooled engine fighter plane with a supercharger tube for high-altitude combat. An outstanding pilot, he broke numerous records with his own aircraft.¹⁸

The major wrote several works on the decisive importance of air power as an expression of military superiority in war and as a political factor, as well as a factor in development and progress during peace. His most famous book was *Victory Through Air Power* in 1942, which was made into a film by Walt Disney. He was also the author of *Air Power: Key to Survival*. Their titles highlighted air power as a determining factor for the victory and survival of “Christian civilization,” in the vocabulary of the Cold War era.¹⁹

His strong personality and insistent preaching allowed him to influence public opinion and the US government to promote his ideas. He was an active lecturer at military and diplomatic institutions in the US, Europe, and Latin America. As an adviser to the Secretary of War, he toured the European and Pacific theaters of operations and visited the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic attack (1945). For his contribution to the victory, he received the Medal for Merit and the rank of General, although he always liked to be recognized as a Major. In 1946, he took part in the nuclear weapons tests conducted at Bikini Atoll.

On two occasions, the President of the US awarded him the prestigious Harmon Trophy (1939 and 1947). In 1947, he contributed to the transformation of the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) into the US Air Force (USAF) and the creation of the Strategic Air Command, to which he served as an advisor.²⁰

In shaping his thinking, de Seversky was influenced by Generals Giulio Douhet and William Mitchell. He was considered an “air power fundamentalist” because he believed that strategic bombing was capable of terminating war on its own.²¹

The era that inaugurated the Second World War was the “Age of Air,” and it would be in the “aerial ocean” that the decisive battle in a future conflict would be fought; to do this, it was necessary to gain air supremacy. The air became a fundamental element of world power, so air power was key.

Air power had to be strategic, i.e., it had to meet the following conditions: keep itself in the air regardless of its base, to assume mastery of the air and deny it to the enemy on his own territory, to achieve freedom of action and, finally, the ability to directly apply its offensive power to destroy the center of the enemy’s war power and its means of waging and sustaining war.

An invincible strategic air power had to be able to attack the enemy directly and demolish its industrial infrastructure, dislocate its transportation system, and eliminate its fuel sources; thus, their surface forces (army and navy) would be immobilized, and the war would be ended.

Unlike the progressive approach of surface forces, the mission of strategic air power consisted of a direct air offensive into the heart of enemy power. Strategic air power was to be intercontinental or interhemispheric and with a range equal to the maximum size of the theater of operations. Its strength consisted of long-range bombers capable of circling the world without landings.

Strategic bombers were to operate from bases in the continental territory itself (without depending on overseas support), directly attack the enemy's military and industrial centers and return to their continental bases without stopping. This would ensure success in choking the enemy's military and industrial effort in his own country. Such is the strategic mission of air power: to end war through victory by power and air dominance. For their part, the surface forces became auxiliaries to air power, and he predicted the decline of naval power and the uselessness of the aircraft carrier.

His views gave an essential role to the US Strategic Air Command, based on the mainland, and framed by deterrence and massive retaliation. He warned that the that country prepared well in advance for intercontinental or interhemispheric air war would be victorious. He stressed the devastating power of nuclear bombs, but clarified that to be effective, air dominance had to be obtained beforehand with the neutralization or defeat of the enemy air force, so that strategic bomber aviation could drop, without interference, its deadly ordnance in the right place and at the right time.

De Seversky laid out a geostrategic scheme related to strategic air power and the global confrontation between the US and the USSR. Both powers had their respective Air Domain sectors, while there was a Decision Area around the North Pole, where these powers had their industrial, military, and logistical centers and the air bases of their long-range strategic aircraft. De Seversky died in New York on 24 August 1974.

Major de Seversky's Visit to Argentina (15 March–18 May 1949)

Between 15 March and 18 May 1949, Major de Seversky visited Argentina.²² That trip took place at a time of great tension between the US and the USSR, while in Argentina, President Perón was fully immersed in reorienting his economic and foreign policy, especially seeking a greater rapprochement with the US.

Major de Seversky's invitation to visit Argentina was the idea of the acting Secretary of Aeronautics, Brigadier César Raúl Ojeda, which was embraced by the Perón government.²³ The prestige of Major de Seversky presented Argentina a great opportunity to interact with a world-renowned figure who could contrib-

ute to the updating of its newly independent Air Force in its formative years. The architect of the visit, Brigadier Ojeda, was also very invested in the education of officers, as he created the Air War College (1944), of which he was a teacher and first director, and looked forward to de Seversky's recommendations.

On 21 February 1949, de Seversky was declared an "official guest of the Argentine Nation" and was exulted as "a friend of America and of the inter-American fraternity, in accordance with the sentiments of our nation, and as one of the main cultivators of continental defense."²⁴ Thus, Perón's government sought to make further friendly diplomatic gestures and signs of rapprochement with the US, as the central objective of its renewed foreign policy.

On 15 March 1949, Major de Seversky's aircraft landed at Morón International Airport, Argentina. He was accompanied by his wife Evelyn Olliphant and Dr. Alfonso Landa, a business and Democratic Party lawyer and friend of President Truman. He promptly visited the Ministers of Aeronautics, National Defense, War, Navy, and Foreign Affairs that same day.²⁵

The next day he attended the swearing-in of the new National Constitution, and on 17 March, he was received by President Perón, and they had a long and animated conversation. Perón was very interested in aviation and promoted aeronautical affairs at multiple levels. General Perón had previously read works by various aviation authors: Colonel Jorge Bartolomé Crespo's *El problema de la aeronáutica en el país como factor económico y de defensa nacional* (*The Problem of Aeronautics in the Country as an Economic and National Defense Factor*) and General Giulio Douhet's *El Dominio del Aire* (*Air Dominance*).²⁶

In his impressions of Perón, de Seversky said that he was "a very likable and cordial man," with a deep knowledge of modern military arts and a clear conception of the application of air power in war.²⁷ He characterized Perón as a great student, particularly of strategy, with a remarkable power of synthesis, clarity and logical rigor.²⁸ He stressed that they were, therefore, fortunate "to have Perón as president."²⁹

On 17 March, the Minister of Aeronautics, Brigadier César Raúl Ojeda, offered Major de Seversky and his wife Evelyn a welcoming reception at the Aeronautics Circle organization. De Seversky remarked that his arrival in Argentina was extremely pleasant and timely, since intercontinental cooperation, in the event of war, was one of his main concerns. For continental defense, de Seversky considered that Central and South America were reliable sources for the production of strategic raw materials and food because they were outside the range of action of Soviet aircraft: that is why "all weapons will have to be forged with South American materials."³⁰ He referred to the large range of action of modern bomber

aircraft, and stated that in order to avoid a global conflict with the USSR it was necessary to create a powerful air force, impossible to surpass.

Between 25 and 27 March, he visited Mar del Plata, a traditional seaside resort on the Atlantic coast, which he described as a “wonderful city,” highlighting “its importance in terms of building infrastructure and its beauty as a place of rest.”³¹ During the flight, he observed that, seen from the air, its importance and well-earned prestige as a seaside resort could be appreciated.³² On 27 March, he traveled to the city of Comodoro Rivadavia, in Patagonia, where he toured “the oil zone.”³³ He described the city as a symbol of “strength and power,” and highlighted the work of the state-owned company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales; the possibilities of increasing oil exploitation and the work, dedication and capability of its workers and technicians, despite the lack of machinery and technological resources.³⁴ He also visited the wool wash facilities, the regional hospital, the Deán Funes college, the tourism hotel, and the seat of government. In Patagonia itself, on 30 March he arrived in the town of San Carlos de Bariloche, where he visited Lake Nahuel Huapi and the national parks, “amazing” places of “imposing beauty,” in his words.³⁵ There, perhaps, he must have tried to gather information about the Huemul project, the ambitious initiative to produce nuclear energy that was then directed by the controversial Austrian Ronald Richter in his mysterious laboratories on Huemul Island. Between 2 and 4 April, de Seversky visited the city of Mendoza, near the Andean Mountain Range. There, the Air Force had the IV Brigade, the seat of the 3rd Attack Regiment. He highlighted the natural beauty of the Patagonian maritime coast and the foothills and their possibilities to promote tourism. On his return to Buenos Aires, he was feted at the US Embassy on 5 April, and the next day he paid a courtesy visit to the first lady, Eva Perón, whom he highlighted as a woman of “great sincerity and devotion to her cause, which is the cause of her people.”³⁶ On 7 April he left for the city of Cordoba, where the Aerotechnical Institute was located, the center of the aeronautical industry, whose various facilities he visited with great interest (workshops, laboratories, factories of specific materials, wind tunnel, assembly and fuselage facilities, test benches). There he “praised the Pulqui and Namcú aircraft,” both of national manufacture, and praised the workers and technicians for their quality, efficiency and dedication.³⁷ He referred to the Aerotechnical Institute as the “first aeronautical factory in South America.”³⁸ At the Cordoba Air Garrison, he visited the Command of Military Aeronautical Institute and the schools of Military Aviation, Specialties, Military Paratroopers (where he became interested in the parachutes of national manufacture) and Aeronautical Engineering.

On 19 April, Major Alexander de Seversky presented his lecture *Air Power in Relation to the Defense of America* at the Aeronautics Circle.³⁹ There he presented

his ideas about air power and its strategic character, as well as the role of South America, and especially Argentina, in continental defense.

He pointed out that, despite its immense and diverse natural resources, the US could not be self-sufficient and depended on different strategic resources from abroad in the event of a conflict. In a war scenario, the US could be driven away from its traditional strategic supply centers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific by Soviet air power. Therefore, it would be essential to access new sources of production of strategic materials outside the enemy's air range and that could be defended with South America acquiring an essential role.

South America was key because of its numerous centers of production of strategic raw materials and food (oil, rubber, tungsten, manganese, cobalt, chromium, tin, hemp, mica, wool, silk, quinine, meat, and agricultural products), fundamental to the military and logistical needs of the US in the event of war. The US strategy was to allow South America to achieve economic self-sufficiency in the production of those indispensable and sensitive resources.

For the US, it was essential to ensure a fluid and permanent flow of supplies of those vital resources from South America to North America, to sustain its war and logistical effort. The US could not "successfully fight another war without the natural resources of South America," it had to manufacture war materiel exclusively from raw materials from South America.⁴⁰

The US was to promote the development of its production resources in South America, exploit its economic possibilities, build up reserves of resources, apply the advances of scientific research to manufacture synthetic materials, and conduct work to identify and plan for strategic natural resources. He supported industrial and agricultural complementarity, taking advantage of agricultural resources to promote industry through chemistry. De Seversky suggested reorienting US agricultural production and related industries in line with South America's production capacity.

He commented that "we must rely on that continent, and especially on the Argentine Republic, to fill the gap in meat, hides and agricultural products that the US will be forced to allocate to the manufacture of indispensable war material."⁴¹

For the common defense of the Western Hemisphere, de Seversky deemed it essential to have a solid and active policy of cooperation with all the countries of the Americas, and to strengthen and complement continental military defense (especially air strategy) to satisfy mutual needs and fulfill the respective roles of each country. Specifically, in regard to hemispheric air defense, he suggested a radar warning system for the entire American continent and unifying the doctrine and air warfare equipment of all countries.

As for the South American air forces, de Seversky saw their main mission as defensive, to protect the resources required for production of strategic materials. Thus, these forces had to be provided with jet fighters, surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft artillery, radars, and other air defense elements. For de Seversky, the US should either promote the manufacture of such defense resources or subsidize South American industries to produce them locally.

He especially highlighted that Argentina had taken a big step in the defense of the Americas by equipping its Air Force with Gloster Meteor jet fighters. He stressed that he understood that “all countries want to have their own bombing force. But the truth is that only the US can take modern strategic actions. Consequently, the mission must be divided up, assigning to South America exclusively a defensive role.”⁴²

While he highlighted the defensive relevance of Argentina’s Gloster Meteors, he warned that its Air Force “gave greater importance to the strategic use of air power.”⁴³ This was evident in the Argentine Air Force Bombardment Command, whose mission was to “hit targets at great distances with its Avro Lincoln and Avro Lancaster heavy bombers.”⁴⁴

De Seversky saw air transport playing an essential role in common American air defense. Thus, it was very important to him to create South American airlines to meet logistical, economic, and operational needs in the event of hemispheric war. These airlines had to rely on a complex network to achieve autonomy and smooth operations: material depots, repair shops, maintenance units and transport aircraft factories. It was very timely that the Ezeiza International Airport was inaugurated during his visit.

De Seversky saw a key role for Argentina in air transport, due to its geographic location. He saw that in peacetime, it would play a decisive role in the development of South America, and in war it would be “the vital artery of our hemisphere.”⁴⁵

In the event of war, the American continent would be divided to prepare for hemispheric war and form a continental mentality:

- *Deployment Belt.* Alaska, Canada, and Newfoundland: From there long-range air forces would strike the very heart of enemy territory.
- *Industrial Belt.* The US would provide the means for war.
- *Supply Belt.* Central and South America: Would constitute a vital reserve of strategic materials and food, far from long-range Soviet aviation. It had to be developed to contribute to the effort of the previous belts.

Regarding that plan, Juan Archibaldo Lanús pointed out that America, “according to the ideas accepted by North American strategists,” could be divided into three areas: North Canada and Alaska, South Canada and the US, and Latin

America and the Caribbean (identified as a supplier of raw materials).⁴⁶ Thus, one of the objectives of the US was aimed at “the continuation of the flow of strategic materials from Latin America.” South America was “for us the storehouse, our natural base of operations.” In short, the strategic, aeronautical, logistical, and economic backyard of the US and a vital area for the defense of the Western Hemisphere in the event of intercontinental or interhemispheric war.⁴⁷

De Seversky warned that “neither the creation of America’s long-range air power, nor the recovery of Europe, can be accomplished without first industrializing South America and developing its natural resources.”⁴⁸ In his initial interviews, he stated that in the US he was asked what help he would offer to South America, but instead he said that “he was not going to offer any help, but to request it.”⁴⁹

During de Seversky’s visit, the *National Aeronautics Review* included editorials with concepts expressed in his lecture and in his meetings with chiefs and officers of the Air Force. The editorials mentioned the intercontinental character of a future war, the decisive role of air power, references to hemispheric air power, the auxiliary role of surface forces, the responsibility of North America in the offensive aspect of hemispheric strategy, and the defensive mission of South America. Regarding South America, it noted that “it constitutes [...] a sort of second backyard destined to serve as an important center of supplies, not only of raw materials of great importance for the development of war, but of the auxiliary and even principal industry to supply the forces engaged in the struggle.”⁵⁰ It emphasized that the strategic objective of air warfare was to destroy the economic vitality of a nation and that war was won by destroying or diminishing the economic war potential of the adversary: “Who destroys the potential of another country with real effectiveness, striking the brain and heart, and not the epidermis of the enemy? Only the air forces.”⁵¹

De Seversky said that in Argentina he had discussed continental defense with Perón and Air Force commanders.⁵² Of the figure of Perón he highlighted: “He impressed me enormously for his intellectual courage, knowledge, and clairvoyance. I am sure that under his leadership Argentina will achieve a miracle of industrialization and unprecedented prosperity.”⁵³

About Argentina, he highlighted its agricultural power (meat, hides, grains), its tungsten deposits, its oil and cement production, and the skill of its workers for mechanics, with industrial potential. He said that the US saw Argentina as an agricultural country, but that when he toured the country he was “pleasantly impressed by its natural resources and industrial possibilities.” Regarding the capabilities of its population, he commented: “I was particularly impressed by the technological ability of the Argentine people. I was amazed at the abundance of

resources and ingenuity to solve the problems presented to the industry by the shortage of raw materials.”⁵⁴

He suggested that Argentina should prioritize automotive and air transport. He pointed out that the “Iron Age” (typical of the railway) was in decline and that the “Age of Light Alloys” (aluminum, the basis of the aeronautical industry) was rising. Automotive and air transport could benefit in Argentina because that country produced oil, cement, aluminum, and manganese; he cited the oil fields of Comodoro Rivadavia and the cement factory of Loma Negra as examples.

For the continental air strategy, he pointed out the importance of the Argentine Air Force’s Gloster Meteors, fundamental to the defensive mission expected of the South American air forces. Cooperation between Argentina and Chile was especially important for hemispheric air defense (detection, warning, and interception from the Atlantic and Pacific). He said that Argentina, the US, and the other countries, working together and in complete solidarity, could turn the Western Hemisphere into a true Fortress of Democracy, capable of creating and supporting global strategic air power, which by itself could deter enemies and guarantee peace.

De Seversky expressed optimism about Argentina’s future, as the country was in an advantageous position to complement US industry, and “considering your natural resources, your innate ability, and the farsightedness and determination of your government, there is in your hands a unique opportunity to rapidly achieve a high standard of industrialization and living.”⁵⁵

As for the Air Force, he said it could forget about the piston engine and go straight to gas turbine and jet propulsion. Of his staff, he highlighted: “I have found a young and dynamic mentality in your minister (Brigadier Ojeda) and in his chiefs and officers; a devotion to the service of aviation and a great enthusiasm in its pilots and technicians.”⁵⁶

On 21 April, he visited transit homes and depots of the Social Aid Foundation, accompanied by Eva Perón, and then proceeded from Buenos Aires to visit Chile (26–29 April) and Uruguay (3–6 May), where he gave lectures and met with their presidents and political, military, and diplomatic authorities.

In a ceremony at the Aeronautical Circle on 16 May, the Minister of Aeronautics Brigadier Ojeda awarded de Seversky a *brevet* and diploma of Argentine military aviator *honoris causa*, in recognition of his contribution to continental defense. In his speech, Brigadier Ojeda said: “The Air Force aspires to be honored with the visitor joining into the spiritual and effective union, with the assurance that we serve a common cause: American integrity and with it the peace of the world.”⁵⁷

On 17 May, he visited the I Brigade and the El Palomar Military Air Base. He toured the maintenance and repair shops for precision equipment, the assembly section, and the offices of the US military aeronautical mission.

That day he also visited the mountain city of Tandil, where he toured the VI Brigade and the Tandil Military Air Base and inspected the Gloster Meteor jet fighters of the 4th Interceptor Fighter Regiment, which he observed lined up and in perfect formation on the runway. He said Argentina had a force of jets like the best in the world. He visited the workshops and attended flying exhibitions of the Gloster Meteors.

Major Alexander de Seversky departed on 18 May 1949, from Morón International Airport to Rio de Janeiro and then to the US. He thanked everyone for the attention received and “praised the high development that our aviation has reached,”⁵⁸ while celebrating the “promising reality of the new life of Argentina.”⁵⁹ He had an excellent impression of Argentina, of the hospitality of its people, of the efforts to realize its industrial progress and of its plans for industrialization and economic development, despite technological limitations. He pointed out that Argentina was a country with a bright future.

Regarding the Argentine Air Force, he stressed that its personnel and materiel were excellent, despite its limited facilities, and that “it has nothing to envy among its foreign counterparts for the capacity of its men and the understanding of its problems.”⁶⁰

He highlighted signs of friendship towards the US, where he would promote that spirit so necessary for the mutual benefit of the Argentine and American peoples,⁶¹ and announced that he would be “a messenger of the truth of the life of this great country.”⁶²

At the same time of de Seversky’s visit, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson asked the US Embassy in Argentina to explain to the Perón government that NATO was a defensive and deterrent initiative.

After Alexander de Seversky’s Visit to Argentina

On 9 January 1951, a new reorganization of the Argentine Air Force was approved, consisting of the following higher leadership entities: Command-in-Chief and Strategic, Tactical, Defense, Transport and Military Aeronautical Institutes air commands. The Brigades were converted into seven self-sufficient or operationally independent units. The reorganization kept the Gloster Meteor force, so well regarded by de Seversky, in their role in hemispheric defense, under Fighter Groups 2 and 3 of the VI Air Brigade (Tandil).

On the other hand, the Strategic Air Command was established, with the mission of “acting offensively on the enemy’s war potential in order to nullify his war

capacity and break his will to continue the fight.” This was in line with the strategic attack ideas of Major de Seversky and to perhaps imitate the USAF Strategic Air Command, an independent stance far removed from the role that was thought for the South American air forces in continental defense.⁶³

In line with de Seversky’s interest in promoting the formation of South American airlines, Aerolíneas Argentinas was created in 1950, while his suggestions to encourage automotive and air transport may have contributed to the creation of the State Aeronautical and Mechanical Industries in 1952, where airplanes, automobiles, tractors, and motorcycles were manufactured.

After Major de Seversky, various personalities from the US visited Argentina (1950–1951): the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Edward Miller, George Kennan, State Department advisor and architect of the Containment Strategy, and the former ambassador to Argentina, George Messersmith, who met with Perón to achieve rapprochement and concrete acts to improve the Argentine-American relationship. However, no major breakthroughs resulted; albeit the Perón government made declarations of goodwill, its anti-communist stance, and that in the event of war with the communist bloc, Argentina would align itself with the US.⁶⁴

Other diplomatic gestures of the Perónist government in its policy of greater rapprochement and cooperation with the US were the severing of relations with the PRC, the recognition of the pro-Western nationalist regime of Taiwan and maintaining distance from Franco’s dictatorship in Spain. Thus, the US agreed to allow Exim Bank, the official export credit agency of the US, to grant a loan to Argentina in 1950.

The Korean War allowed for other friendly gestures by Perón toward the US. Although the Argentine president decided not to send troops to East Asia (although at first, he planned to send volunteers), he approved the 1950 TIAR and reiterated his solidarity and support for the US.

Conclusions

Major Alexander de Seversky’s invitation to Argentina was one of the first acts of the Perón government in its renewed foreign policy aimed at achieving greater ties with the US and seeking its financial help to conduct industrial modernization projects.

In the early years of the Cold War (1945–1953), marked by the great tension between the US and the USSR, the foreign policy line proposed by the government of General Perón was articulated within Argentina’s own economic and defense needs.

The visit of a figure of recognized aeronautical prestige such as Major de Seversky's, was of great benefit to the Argentine Air Force, an institution that, with barely four years of independence, needed to review and update its doctrine, organization, mission, and responsibilities to correctly position itself in the new international and strategic post-WWII environment.

His meetings with chiefs and officers of the Argentine Air Force inspired or contributed to strengthening the idea of a modern Air Force that played a leading role in hemispheric defense, to consolidate jet fighter aviation as a fundamental element of air defense, emphasized the need for a close relationship between the Air Force and the airlines, highlighted the importance of supplementing air and motor transport, and maintaining a Strategic Air bombing capability.

Finally, it should be noted that after the visit of Major de Seversky, a marked influence of the US on the Argentine Air Force began to manifest itself, which would last for decades in multiple aspects. □

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